



February 17, 2025

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Owens and MacDonald, Members of the Committee –

On behalf of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO), we would like to express our strong **support for House Bill 3527**, which will establish critical assistance for low-income families who are struggling to pay their water bill and are at risk of being disconnected from this basic necessity.

CAPO represents 18 local community action agencies, non-profit organizations created during former President Lyndon B Johnson's "War on Poverty" to address the needs of low-income families overcome poverty-related barriers. While each community is different, key services include housing assistance, emergency food programs, job training, energy bill assistance, and childcare support.

In 2021, through federal funding, Community Action Agencies collaborated closely with Oregon Housing & Community Services, distributing more than \$10 million in water assistance helping nearly 18,600 households. In setting up this program, Community Action Agencies established vendor agreements with 268 water utilities throughout the state. With the federal program expiring last year, this statewide investment will help fill a gap to provide much needed assistance to low-income Oregonians.

The legislation will take advantage of the hard work undertaken to establish a program to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance and build on the initial federal investment with critical state financial assistance. It would use lessons learned from the federal program and expand access to Oregonians currently ineligible for assistance who live in multi-family dwellings and pay for water bundled with rent.

There is a significant need for a water and sewer bill payment assistance program. Oregon, like much of the U.S., has seen rising costs for basic living expenses low-income families, these rising costs can make it difficult to pay for essential services like electricity, water, and heating. This is especially troubling for low-income communities, seniors, people with disabilities and families with children, who are especially vulnerable when it comes to paying for water. Many of these individuals live on fixed incomes, such as Social Security or disability payments, which doesn't keep up with inflation or the rising cost of living. Without assistance, they often need to make difficult choices, such as paying for essential water services and other basic needs like food, healthcare, or housing.

For most having to turn off water for a short time is an inconvenience, which makes you appreciate having access to water. Unfortunately, many are faced with this reality. **Please join us in support of House Bill 3527 to allow us to continue to provide assistance to prevent families from losing access to safe drinking water.**